

Finberg's interpretation of Tavistock Abbey

REDISCOVERING TAVISTOCK ABBEY Revelation framework

Prepared for Tavistock Heritage Trust

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Introduction

In 2019 the Devon Historic Buildings Trust (DHBT) began working on investigating a future for the remains of the Abbey in Tavistock such that they would be safeguarded for the future as well as more readily understood and appreciated by the public. What research and information there is about the abbey and its community, is fragmented and not easily located. Discussions were held with the officers of Tavistock Town Council, one of the major stakeholders, and with Historic England to look at the feasibility of what could be done, and to find a way forward.

In 2021, following the easing of access from the pandemic, the DHBT held discussions with the Tavistock Heritage Trust to see whether the skills and knowledge gained from the Tavistock Guildhall refurbishment and the creation of the World Heritage Site Interpretation Centre could be brought to bear when looking at the abbey remains. The DHBT is fully supportive of the proposed way forward.

This framework and the documents referred to herein have been prepared by the following volunteers:

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This document should be read in conjunction with Le Page Architects document 'Rediscovering Tavistock Abbey Supporting Statement'

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Appendix C – The Creation and Life of Tavistock Abbey
(Separate document)

1. The main objectives:

As set out below the objectives are wide and diverse to ensure the continuous repair and care of the abbey remains, which are Listed and a Schedule Ancient Monument. They will ensure long term interest both from the local community and visitors, and provide knowledge of the abbey, which until now has been rather piecemeal, and create an educational resource for schools and research.

The intention is to:

- ❖ Prevent further unnecessary deterioration of the abbey remains.
- ❖ Determine approved methods of repairs and restoration of the abbey remains to ensure good conservation long term, and relieve the burden on the owners by the determination and agreement of the appropriate levels and methods of conservation.
- ❖ Repair and restoration of Betsy Grimbal's Tower and the Still House such that they are open at all levels to the public.
- ❖ Carryout a full geophysical survey of the St Eustachius churchyard, Plymouth Road, the Square and the area on which the abbey stood from which a 3D computer generated interpretation would be made.
- ❖ Carryout the investigation of and conservation of, and long-term presentation of the abbey remains in, and around, Betsy Grimbal's Tower.
- ❖ Investigate the relationship between the abbey and St Eustachius via a geophysical survey.
- ❖ Carryout archaeological dig of the floor of the gateway of Betsy Grimbal's tower and at the cloister remains, to locate the original ground levels, and a third location as yet to be determined – to be carried out by local people/schools under the direction of an archaeologist.
- ❖ Set up a community project to find other unknown remains of the abbey – 'find our abbey'.
- ❖ Provide visual and digital interpretation of the abbey for visitors, and for educational purposes.
- ❖ Produce a booklet about the various aspects of the abbey and its life.

2. Workstreams:

A. Project Governance

The Group consists of knowledgeable volunteers with a background in buildings, conservation and archaeology which is overseen by the Board of Tavistock Heritage Trust (THT) in conjunction with Tavistock Town Council. Additional skills which may be required, will be invited to participate as the project progresses.

The establishment of goals, adjustments to the organisation of the Group and its modus operandi will be reviewed on a regular basis, as the project progresses.

B. Project Management

On the establishment of the project, it will be necessary to form a project management group working in conjunction with Tavistock Town Council to determine the work streams and the scope, methods, deliverables and timeframes of the various elements of the project. The group will monitor the progress of the work streams, agree the specification, budget, timeframe and contract terms where professional input is required. The group will advise the THT on procurement of contracted services, and assist the THT on reporting to funding agencies as required.

C. Stakeholder and Community Engagement

At this early stage all stakeholders have been identified and their interests defined as this will impact on the project. Their interests vary as they depend on the condition of the abbey remains in their ownership, whether they are a public or private body, and whether they are prepared to consider public access.

The Group has engaged with the public stakeholders to explain the project, and to better understand their interests and future decision-making structures. Their participation is essential. In due course a package, based on the main aims will be put together by the group for discussion with the stakeholders to determine their level of interest.

The Group will assess issues arising from these initial consultations with the stakeholders and will assess the impact, both good and bad, prior to providing feedback for potential adjustments to the project.

Once the stakeholders' level of interest has been determined and through the THT's existing public structures i.e., press releases, social media and web site, information on the project will be disseminated for community engagement on the work in progress, and for feedback. Further community engagement will take place through meetings, the media, events.

A register of all stakeholders and all public engagement will be held by the THT.

D. Surveys – building and archaeological, and the integration of records

Currently, building condition surveys have been carried out on elements of the abbey remains including the Stillhouse and Betsy Grimbal's tower as commissioned by the Tavistock Town Council, however, they are no longer current. The public pieces of the visible elements of the abbey will require condition surveys which will inform the repair works; collating surveys will provide a more complete picture of the abbey buildings.

Since the 19th century archaeological works have been carried out and findings recorded in some areas of the abbey. The information which is available needs to be catalogued such that it will demonstrate that further investigations are needed to provide a more accurate and complete picture of the abbey and its grounds.

The archaeological priorities:

- ❖ A detailed plan and survey of the whole abbey precinct, incorporated with GIS or similar, so that all data relating to the abbey is in digital format and readily accessible. This would act as a baseline for the 3-D layout and analysis of the Abbey buildings – which could be used both for scholarly research and public interpretation.
- ❖ The archaeological investigation of the deposits at the base of Betsy Grimbal's Tower to establish historic ground levels.
- ❖ Completion of the measured survey of the Court Gate.
- ❖ A full survey of the cloister wall in St Eustachius' churchyard.
- ❖ Geophysical survey in the parish churchyard and within the church of St Eustachius as one way of possibly adding to what is known of the plan of the abbey church, and solving some of the problems of its reconstruction using non-intrusive techniques.
- ❖ Geophysical investigation of specific areas of open land in Plymouth Road to try and locate and sequence deposits of the monastic fishponds.
- ❖ Completing the catalogue of architectural stone fragments.
- ❖ The recording of any architectural fragments relating to the Abbey buildings in the local area brought to light through a community heritage awareness initiative.

- ❖ Improvement in the publicity and display material on the abbey available in digital and hardcopy locally and online is a priority.

Further work which should be considered:

- ❖ The review of all existing archaeological reports and standing building recording. Much data is in digital format at Devon Archives, some of which may require specific software to be readable. All significant published reports have been read, but some unpublished reports and no primary records have been examined; these latter include plans, drawings and photographs as well as other digital data.
- ❖ Record and conserve, as needed, the historic wall adjoining the post office car park and forming the back of the Bedford Hotel/nonconformist chapel.
- ❖ Measured survey of the interior elevation of the west precinct wall, especially to establish the extent of the surviving medieval fabric and the post-medieval structural history of the wall (to complement the study of the south precinct wall made by Kirsty Rodwell in 1995).
- ❖ Investigation of the roof of the West Devon club to ascertain structure and date.
- ❖ Investigation of the roof timbers of the Abbey Chapel to ascertain structure and date.
- ❖ Investigation through GPR of suspected/obscured features within or under the Bedford Hotel to determine their possible age, form and function.
- ❖ Examination of primary records of the Bedford estates – such as documents relating to the construction of the Tavistock canal, layout of sewers, construction of the Bedford Hotel, layout of Plymouth Road, etc. – lodged in the Devon Archives to see if they contain any relevant archaeological data.

Once the level of surveying work has been determined, the Group will oversee the setting up of the works contracts, review the outcomes and identify and interpret features of historic interest. The surveys will form the background to visualisations and will input into 3D modelling. Collation of the survey information into useful formats for public interpretation and communication will follow including the overall management and review of the information obtained.

E. Historical research

The History Research Group (HRG) of the THT, through the Abbey Group, will determine a work plan and assign tasks to pull together recognised sources of information on the abbey, its life, power and work. This would include the cataloguing of known reference sources including references to other abbeys of the period which may provide insights. See Appendix B for an initial understanding of the abbey and its life and Appendix C for the Convent of Tavistock and its Buildings. The research group work will include identifying potential wider information sources which may provide further insights such as its relation with the Crown, regional role, local social impact on everyday life, the life of a Benedictine monk/abbot.

The HRG will draw together information of the abbots and their stories and collate it such that the Public Liaison Group may communicate it to a wider audience in various forms.

Information which is categorised will show whether it is evidence based and authoritative, or inductive and speculative.

The main group will coordinate with the THT Discovery Team to identify useful structures of historical information that would feed into the storytelling and educational streams. The group would liaise with the Public Interpretation Group to ensure the validity of information which is to be published.

F. Public Interpretation and Communication

Public Liaison Group (PLG) under the main group, but through the THT management to be formed to manage the development of public information. This will identify the potential range of users and formats of information on the abbey such as interpretation graphics and booklet, town guides, school visits on route information, audio guides, phone app links, promotional material and so on.

Working with the THT Discovery Team, the target level of communication will be determined to suit various levels of interest such as the passing visitor, school visits, commercial history tours, history buffs, and so on. Research into other similar UK historic sites modus operandi will set best practice levels.

Through and with the other heritage trusts/groups in the town, it will be necessary to set the outline of scope and concepts of an ideal interpretation and communications programme such that there is no conflict and that it informs the current or any future interpretation, and agree materials to be distributed to a wider audience to increase visitor presence in the town.

The group will work with the stakeholders to ensure that they are content with the appropriate level of interpretation material proposed and will support them through the procurement process for the development of the interpretation material.

G. Repair, Maintenance and Public Access

Following consultation with regard to funding the Abbey Group has determined that they should focus on the elements of the abbey which are ruins and are more easily open to the public via guided visits; namely Betsy Grimbals Tower, the Still House and the cloister remains.

The THT will develop a plan to define and manage the repair works and public access to it, whilst the works are in hand. The level of repair and levels of maintenance will be determined by the building professional contracted by each building owner; currently the extent of work varies from the completion of restoration, such as Trowtes House, to outdated outline specifications and schedules prepared for Betsy Grimbals Tower and the Stillhouse, to none for the cloister ruins. The scope of specialist service contracts will be necessary to ensure best conservation practice, including materials and workmanship. Such works will enable trade skill training for the partnership staff. Further, access whilst the works are progressing will encourage the public to understand conservation and even consider it as a career.

Current information on the condition of all the various elements of the abbey are:

Trowtes House – completed repair. Restoration 2021.

Betsy Grimbals Tower – and Still House – full condition survey and archaeological surveys completed. A Schedule of Works was prepared for the Tavistock Town Council for the repair/restoration of the stonework 2017. This work will need to be extended to meet the brief for public access as well as updated. The outline costing has been updated in October 2023.

Information which might be available:

Abbey Chapel – possible quinquennial report.

Cloister remains in St Eustachius churchyard – possible quinquennial report.

Probably not available or carried out:

River Walk walls within the curtilage of the Bedford Hotel and the West Devon Club.

Wall between the Bedford Hotel and the Vicarage.

Courtgate a condition survey has yet to be carried out by the Tavistock Town Council.

The main group will identify and catalogue all known exposed built elements of the abbey and its associated buildings and their owners to assist in the initial consultation work and as an on-going record for future reference. The condition reports, surveys and works to be carried out for each built element will be collected and archived for future reference.

Consultation with the owners has taken place regarding the extent of public access and this will be on-going; this will impact on the works that will be required to ensure the suitable level of conservation and safety once open to the public.

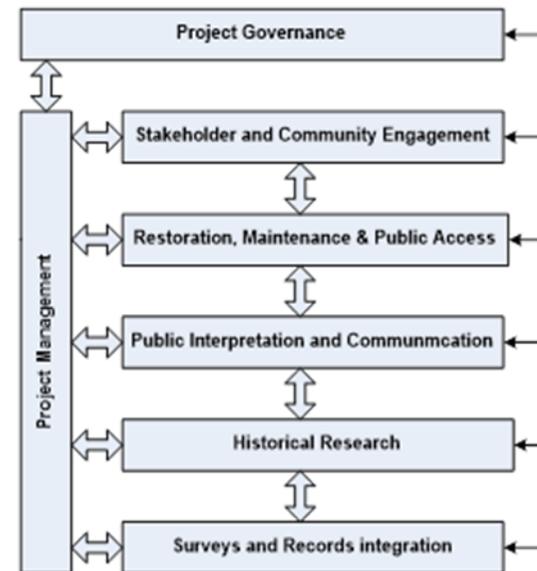
Further consultation with the stakeholders will take place to solicit long-term partnerships for the repair and ongoing maintenance of the remains, and for works required to facilitate public access in the long term.

H. Finance and funding

The Works Streams outlined in this Revelation Framework address Historic England objectives and criteria for grant funded services and works.

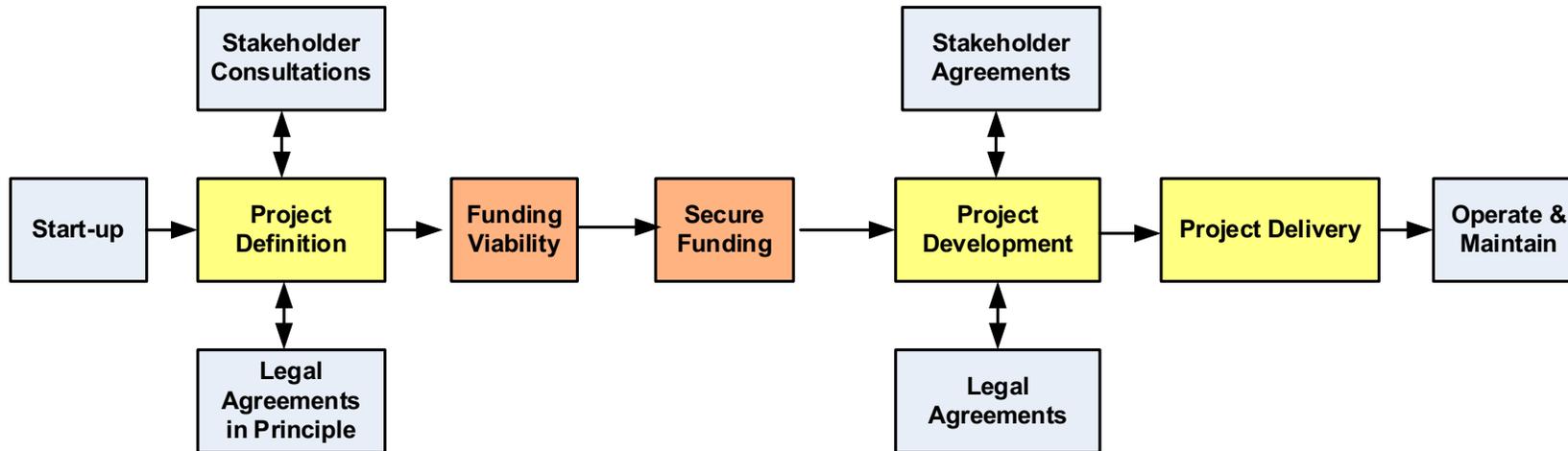
Tavistock Heritage Trust (THT) will seek an HE Repair Grant for stabilising repairs and funding for professional services for the investigations and the full repair works of the of publicly owned Abbey remains. Further funding will be sought from NHLF, and other grant sources as necessary.

Private owners will remain responsible for funding the conservation works of their parts of the Abbey remains.



I. Tavistock Revelation Overview

The stages and timing of project definition, development, funding, and delivery outlined below is for review with key stakeholders to seek agreement in principle as we progress.



Indicative timeframe

2021	2021/22	2022/23	2024	From 2024
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